



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

TENDENCIES IN FRENCH LITERATURE

BY GEORGES LECHARTIER

It seems premature yet to look for the essential changes which the Great War has brought into literature, as it undoubtedly has into other forms and conditions of life, in France. It does not appear, at first glance, that any considerable change has recently taken place in French literature. The same names of authors are printed on the covers of the same magazines. These names, however, are not as numerous as they were before the summer of 1914, since many of them, including some of the best known, are now written on small wooden crosses on the battlefields of the Aisne and the Marne. Thus is written the name of Péguy, one of the youngest and most promising poets of the new school; so is that of Ernest Psichari, who in his last book, *L'appel aux Armes*, seems to have foreseen and foretold his own glorious death. But the roll of honor is too long to be fully recounted here.

Most of these young men belonged to the new school of literature, which was founded by a young professor, newly out of the *École Normale*, the school where the intellectual élite in France, after having passed a very difficult examination, undergo a wonderful training in Arts or in Science before being appointed to professorships in one of the Universities. This young man, Romain Rolland, author of the much-discussed pacifist book *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, had scarcely left the *École Normale* after being graduated when he became the editor of *Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, a magazine which soon led him to pecuniary bankruptcy. Around these *Cahiers*, an élite of young intellectuals began to meet, and a new literary formula found its expression among them.

The inspiration of this new literature was usually obscure or foggy in itself; and it was often made more so by the recondite character of its expression. Too often the writer indulged in

or sought for some symbol, which was supposed to summarize a great number of high truths, deep thoughts and rare sentiments. And it did not matter if the plain truth were lost in the symbolism.

This school, so much opposed to the French genius, of which the formula is clearness, harmony, moderation and measure, does not seem to have survived the war. And although Paul Claudel, who is to-day the best representative of it, has some late admirers and some very young disciples, it seems to have yielded its ephemeral vogue to still less worthy and more ephemeral groups, such as Dadaism, which is to Literature what Cubism is to Art—a depressing parody, of which the less said the better.

Real French literature, which has always found its better expression in classicism and in realism,—the latter not to be misunderstood for naturalism,—is now as ever presented in the old and best-known magazine *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, the conservative review *Le Correspondant*, and the more advanced magazine, *La Revue de Paris*.

The inspiration which is now dominant in the articles, notably in the novels, published by these magazines, presents a characteristic departure from that which prevailed before the war. From the realist, dogmatic, social and almost eventless type of the spring of 1914, and after the great success of the master-novel of Paul Bourget, *Le Démon de Midi*, this inspiration has in the last two years become romanesque, sensational and decidedly individualist. Study has yielded to imagination, reality to extravagant fiction, analysis and observation to action. No better illustration of this is to be found than in the last book of Paul Bourget, *Un Drame dans le Monde*, first published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*.

In *Le Démon de Midi*, the whole story presented by Paul Bourget was, through some pictures of country and Parisian life, the normal development of normal characters in a situation of everyday life. No thrilling episode, almost no excitement, was to be found. The plot was smooth, devoid of sensation. How very different is his *Un Drame dans le Monde*! Of course there is still the basic and—in his novels—almost essential triangle. But this is only the means of studying a character caught in the storm of passion, incited and nearly forced through ex-

traordinary circumstances to commit a low and abject crime (murder of an old relative to get her money), and then seized by the anguish and agony of remorse. It is in fact the subject of the great novel of Dostoievsky, *Crime and Punishment*, transferred to high society in Paris in the year 1920. The only difference is that in the Russian story the centre of interest is in the fears of the murderer that he will be caught by the police and be sentenced to death, while in Paul Bourget's novel it is in the internal and never-ceasing remorse of the culprit who, secure from all suspicion, is terrorized by her own conscience as by an ever-present and ceaselessly-calling judge or executioner.

A woman who belongs to the smart set of Paris, the elegant and attractive Countess Odette de Malhyver, "tall and slender, with an extremely aristocratic profile, where every feature told the race," knowing no other rule than the customs and tolerance of her social circle, is deeply in love with the elegant and handsome Xavier de Larzac, who, heroic in the war, since peace has been signed professes in his club to hate war and to despise heroism. He had been infatuated with the fascinating Odette for a long time before the war, but is now seriously engaged in flirting with a society butterfly, the very rich and charming Cecile Machault. Odette's husband, the Count of Malhyver, is a half-dreamer, half-scientist or laic apostle, comrade of heroism in the trenches and always the friend of Xavier. Educated by the war, he believes now that every man, every citizen of a country, has a duty toward his country. He is anxious to fulfill his new duty created by peace, which he sees in the traditions of his family; he wishes to live with his peasants, socially helping and morally leading them, in the land of his forefathers. He is confirmed in his resolution by the fact that he has just learned that, through his wife's extravagance and his own carelessness, and because they have maintained their old *train de vie* in the new and high cost of living, they are half ruined.

But the views of Odette on the subject are entirely different. She wants to stay in Paris because the man she loves is in Paris. And no consideration, however social or moral, can divert her from this aim. Then a means of avoiding country life and simultaneously the dreaded ruin is offered to her, from which

she at first recoils. She has been called to the bedside of an old, narrow-minded and very rich aunt, who, as she knows, has disinherited her. She is left alone to pass the night in the sick room. She knows that the will which contains her fate is somewhere there, and she has every reason to believe that there is no copy of it. If the will is destroyed, of course she will inherit; and this means that she will stay in Paris with Xavier.

The scene of the hesitation, of the repulsion, then the quick succession of decisive actions, looking for and finding the will, throwing it into the fire, is a masterpiece of art. So is the following scene, when Odette suddenly perceives that her aunt, momentarily a helpless paralytic, has seen her act; she realizes that as soon as the old woman recovers the use of her tongue she will denounce her; and she concludes that the only way to safety is to pour an overdose of digitalin into the beverage that has been prepared to soothe the invalid's pain and help her to sleep. In a mad fit, Odette mechanically pours the poison, refills the bottle with water, and flies from the room. Everything goes as she expected. The nurse gives the poisoned beverage. The old woman dies. Nobody suspects that the death has not been natural. Odette inherits.

Then commences the slow, relentless gnawing of remorse, made acute and alive by every detail of Odette's everyday life. She has a son, the very sight of whom, the son of a murderer, brings a new pain to her. The conversation, the mere presence, of her husband, with his lack of suspicion, she cannot bear. But her remorse reaches the climax when she discovers that her beloved Xavier is false to her for the sake of the captivating Cecile, and that he loves her no more; and she realizes that the haunting crime which she perpetrated for his sake and love was committed in vain. It seems to her that she has filled up the measure of abjection and misery when, after a highly dramatic interview, in which she at last confesses what she has done, the man who has been the direct cause of all only tears himself from her, orders her out, and shrieks to her, "Go! Go! You fill me with horror!"

Her punishment begins. She flies to the old castle, where her husband lives with her son. And there we witness, through

small daily events or through the diary written by the utopian, blind and straightforward husband, the progress, slow and sure, of the incurable pain and agony, until Odette can bear the suffering no more, and until she is morally and physically obliged to confess to her husband both her crimes. There the interest of the book ends. Why the super-husband forgives, and how Odette strives to merit that forgiveness by staying for the remnant of her life in the old country home, devoting herself to the education of her son and to moral and social improvement of the rural population around her, we do not greatly care.

Such an extended analysis of Paul Bourget's book may not appear useless if we consider, first, that it was the book of the year in France and has supplied themes of conversation in most of the drawing rooms and social meetings in Paris and in the provinces, and second, that it illustrates better than any other example the new tendency of French literature toward sensation and action. Of course this new tendency could be found and just as easily pointed out in many other much-read novels of yesterday and of to-day; such, for instance, as *La Resurrection de la Chair* and *La Chair et L'Esprit*, by Henry Bordeaux. It is still better emphasized in Pierre Benoit's *L'Atlantide*. In a book of an entirely different inspiration, *Saint Magloire* by Roland Dorgeles, is a similar indication.

M. Dorgeles is the young author of *Les Croix de Bois*, a book published during the war which, because of its presentation of war scenes as seen by a soldier in the trenches, appealed immediately to the sentiment and to the very heart of the French public and carried the author to fame. His second book was, of course, waited for with great curiosity. It is always a much to be dreaded experience for a young author to come again before the public when his first appearance has proved such a success. Nobody is, as a rule, inclined to indulgence and the easy sentence, "This second book is not, by far, comparable to the first," seems to be the general verdict. M. Dorgeles was lucky enough, until now, to avoid this criticism and so, if his friends refrain from the first and somewhat excessive admiration which they showed, *Saint Magloire* may remain as one of the good books of this year.

Saint Magloire is the story of a man of medium standing in

country life who, for some not very clear causes, went to Africa in order to evangelize the negroes. The gospel he preaches is a mixture of Manicheism, Buddhism, and Socialism that has very little or nothing to do with the Gospel of Christ and that seems, in fact, to be just as vague or obscure in the mind of the author as it is in the sermons of the Saint. The essential of it appears to be that two principles, one good and the other bad, fight in the conscience of every man, and the good one, after several experiences or after a series of successive lives, comes out generally as a winner, if the circumstances are favorable. How this singular theory has captivated and converted the African negroes is not explained. But we are told that it has been so. And, when the book begins, we learn that the Saint is coming back to his birthplace, a half-industrial, half-agricultural village, where everybody awaits him with emotion and where, against the word of the Christian Gospel, he soon becomes a prophet. However, being thus and unexpectedly favored by circumstances, whatever he tries in good intention turns out for the worse to those he wants to help. His family, where happiness and quietness reigned before his return, knows now fear, restlessness, and care: laughter is no more heard or allowed. The factory, where every man used to be pleased with his fate and where everything ran for the benefit of all, is now torn by discontent, jealousy of the workingmen toward the employers, aspiration of all for more justice, and, of course, for higher wages and shorter work-hours. At last Saint Magloire leaves the village to go to Paris in order to make more people profit by his new gospel. In Paris he enters the Chamber of Deputies during a session and immediately interrupts the debate by addressing the House and preaching solidarity between men and justice. He is not—as may have been well expected—immediately apprehended and gently sent to some asylum. On the contrary, while his adepts, who have followed and cheered him, are duly beaten by the police, he is protected by the same police against his opponents and, after some conversation, he is persuaded to go back to his village.

But while he has been campaigning in Paris everything seems to have gone wrong. On returning home he finds that his family has badly misbehaved, that the factory is on strike and that the

small town is on the eve of a revolution. For all this he is, in some way or another, the only one responsible. In despair over this outcome, but not convinced that anything is wrong in the cause, he goes back to his negroes, the only people, as it seems, who are capable to understand him entirely and to realize the beauty of his gospel.

The intention of the author in writing this book is somewhat obscure. If he intended to teach us a new truth, expressing at the same time the thought that we might not be mature for it, we might agree that he was entirely right as far as the second proposition goes, but we are none the less sure that his new truth is worth listening to. If he only desired to illustrate once more the fact that the best man in the world, animated with the best intentions for the greatest happiness of all, may innocently sow discord, hatred and wholesale murders among his fellowmen and possibly destroy the whole world, we may find that the book is not wholly conclusive. And we may prefer to it the short story of Voltaire, *Memnon, or the Human Wisdom*, where the author, with incomparable interest and wit, presents to us the man who, "having decided one morning that he would be perfectly wise, commits nothing but foolishness during the whole day long." But if M. Dorgeles chose his subject as being the most convenient to show us the numerous circles of private and public life as pictures of life, we must agree that he succeeded.

This too rapid study would not be complete, however, if we did not at least indicate some of the progress of other currents of French literature, particularly that of History. The historians have been pursuing their great task, which now above all consists in fixing for generations to come the causes, the responsibilities, the developments and the achievements of the Great War. It is extremely difficult to take some *vues d'ensemble* of events which are still so near that we can scarcely see them save through the particular, detailed and inevitably prejudiced views of those who have been their spectators or actors, more often both. Each of these witnesses has seen only a small part, but naturally feels inclined to think that this small part is the most if not the only important one. It will be one of the interesting effects of the war to prove how often the most reliable

documents can be candidly falsified, even by the most truthful and sincere person. The great work of the historians of to-day is not merely to search for and to gather documents, but also to find, among all the documents they have, the few which they can rely on, from which to write a trustworthy history of the war. This delicate and difficult work has already been tried with much success by Victor Giraud in his *Histoire de la Grande Guerre*. It is still methodically and scrupulously pursued in every part of the monumental *Histoire de la Guerre* prepared by the most prominent historians under the direction of M. Hano-taux. The great care of each and all of these writers is to achieve a true and scientific history, in opposition to the well-known and sceptical definition of Anatole France: "History is not a science. It is an art. One succeeds there only by using his imagination."

The same praise we have just given to the historians of facts and events should be awarded to the historians of Art. The *Histoire de l' Art*, published by the most capable French writers on Art under the direction of André Michel, will certainly stand, not only in France but in all countries interested in Art, a monument of the history of all the different arts from their origin down to their latest achievements in modern time. It counts already many volumes, all gorgeously illustrated with many and the most curious reproductions and engravings. The last volume published deals with Art during the seventeenth century, and is in all points worthy its predecessors.

The same tendencies which have been indicated in the French novel may be marked in the theatre of to-day. But by a strange anomaly, while the novel seeks movement and action, the theatre, at least the young theatre, conscious of its own importance, becomes an analyst and individualist. The action, when there is any, is secondary, and comes at the will of the playwright only to help the development or the explanation of some part of the leading character. Instead of being the real centre of interest, the action turns around one individual, placed by the author in exceptional circumstances which constrain him to reveal the depths of his mind and soul.

The best examples of this are furnished in many of the plays

presented at the theatre of Le Vieux-Colombier, which, since its return from its three-years' course in New York, is considered the most advanced theatre of Paris. At this house, *Le Pauvre sous l'escalier* was the best play of the type we have just defined. All the play is the very sad story of Saint Alexis, of his religious calling, of his return to his creed, of his penitent life, of his death. Of the same inspiration and type is *L'Annonce faite à Marie* of Paul Claudel. It is the long, lamenting, dull, gloomy and—to the healthy and unprejudiced spectator—quite unendurable story of the election of a soul by God, the retirement of the elect from the world, her purification, her reward, her martyrdom.

The Nouveau Théâtre produced *Le Cœur des Autres* and *La Souriante Madame Beudet*, also comedies or dramas of personality. The first one shows an artist wholly unable to enjoy life, even so far as to feel as others feel, because through his profession, his art, or simply his mania, he reduces the feelings and hearts of those who cross his way, and perhaps who love him and whom he might have loved, into dramatic episodes and literature. The second play studies the secret hatred and the spirit of revenge which slowly grow in an oppressed and humiliated heart. *La Comédie du génie*, by François de Curel, is also the story of a soul. At the Théâtre de Paris *L'Homme à la Rose* has given a new study and a fresh incarnation of the eternal Don Juan. A somewhat similar motive may be detected in the last play of the well known playwright, M. Henry Bataille, *La Chair Humaine*, which was presented at the Vaudeville recently.

The main idea of the play seems to be that many or all of us who, during the War, were capable of great sentiments and noble thoughts, returned to our true nature immediately after the armistice was signed, and with the peace renewed their prejudices.

This familiar banality is exposed in the story of a certain man, Levasseur, who has two sons, one illegitimate, Boulard, and the other, known to all, Pierre. During the war Boulard has been a hero and is supposed to have been killed, whilst Pierre has only been a slacker. And, of course, the family Levasseur has been enthusiastic about the gallantry of Boulard, and the father has said many times, and has really meant it every time he has said

it, that if Boulard had not been killed he would have felt proud to give to this noble son the name to which he was entitled. Armistice has come. It begins to be known that Boulard has not been killed as first thought but has been made prisoner in a German camp of retaliation. He comes back. And all those who were so proud of him a few months ago have had time to cool off, and are now in the grip of the old routine, and they find themselves much embarrassed, reserved, and almost hostile when he comes. This scene is excellent. Finally Boulard, who is a philosopher, understands that the praise he received while in his camp was, in fact, addressed to the war hero that he was and there is no place in this family for the man of peace that he actually is. So he decides to leave this "human flesh" and go back to his own mother. This study of the influence of extraordinary events on ordinary character of every day life is one of the best plays produced during these three last years.

So the French theatre seems to incline toward the tragedy of character. And, doing this, it may appear that it is only returning to its old tradition and to what has been the first formula of the classic theatre. In fact, however, a striking difference exists between the two. For the ancient play of characters, such as we find at its best in the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, and even more in the comedies of Molière, was always the study of a general, almost universal, character, where every spectator could detect and vindicate some part of his own humanity. The hero, in the classical theatre, was surrounded by other characters which helped him to develop his own. In the modern play, on the contrary, the hero seems to recoil upon himself, as far away from humanity as he seems to believe it elegant to be; and the external world is only to him the accidental occasion of enjoying his supernatural or ridiculously artificial isolation. The study of dramatic literature shows that whenever the theatre has given itself to the presentation of exceptional characters, its literary as well as its social value has decreased, and it has scarcely, and only for academic interest, survived its epoch. It is somewhat distressing to acknowledge that it is this course that is being followed by the French theatre of to-day.

GEORGES LECHARTIER.